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ABSTRACT

This paper briefly compares the uses of video as a medium of instruction in higher education in the United States and China and makes tentative explanations from a sociocultural perspective of the differences between these countries in using this medium. Video has been used similarly in a number of ways in both countries, but the ways it is used and the frequency of use have been different. Video as a supplement to instruction is used more frequently in the United States than in China. In the United States it is also used more often to provide input for discussion or other kinds of further work, but in China it is used as an end in itself. The difference lies in the fact that the United States has more equipment and easier access. Chinese teaching still relies on the instructor's delivery, rather than video, and students still tend to feel that the instructor's delivery is superior to video use. To make video more important in Chinese higher education, it will be necessary to change perceptions about delivery as well as to improve access. (Contains 10 references.) (Author/SLD)

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NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE USE OF VIDEO IN AMERICAN HIGHER EDUCATION AND THAT IN CHINESE HIGHER EDUCATION

A RESEARCH PAPER SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FUFILLMENT OF INDEPENDENT STUDY
FOR THE DEGREE
MASTER OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF LEADERSHIP AND EDUCATIONAL POLICY STUDIES

BY

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Abstract

The paper briefly compares the uses of video as a medium of instruction in higher education between the United States and China, and makes tentative explanations from a social-cultural perspective of the differences in using this medium between these two countries. Video has been used similarly in a number of aspects in both countries, but differently in amount and method of its use. Video as a supplement of instruction is used more often in the U.S. than in China. It is also more often used to provide input for discussion or other kind of further work in U.S., whereas, it is used as an end in itself in China. The difference lies in the fact that U.S. has more equipment and easier access to it. Thus Chinese teaching is still through instructor's delivery rather than video.

A Comparative Study of the Use of Video in American Higher Education and that in Chinese Higher Education

Introduction

The usefulness of video as an educational medium has gained worldwide recognition from educators at various levels in recent years. However, because of uneven economic development, differences in cultural traditions and some other reasons, the extent and the specific purpose of using video in education vary from country to country. This paper sets out to compare the use of video in American higher education and that in Chinese higher education, and to explain tentatively the differences in the use of this medium between these two countries.

The Use of Video in American Higher Education

American educators have become increasingly aware that the current generation of students who have watched a great deal of television since childhood is more visually-oriented than print-oriented. Many, therefore, feel that it is of great value and necessity to integrate the medium of video into the learning process. They, therefore, have explored the possible ways of using video and have chiefly used it in two ways: as a major medium of instruction and as a supplementary medium of instruction. Let us now examine each way in turn (Dranov, P. 1980).

Video as a Major Medium of Instruction

The use of video as a major medium of instruction in higher education in America began in the 1950's when closed circuit TV was first introduced. Since then, it is rapidly gaining ground. Now, entire courses are prerecorded to be shown on TV. For example, the University of Arizona Macrocampus offers full-credit courses in all types of engineering, mathematics, business and some liberal arts. Students can register by mail or by telephone, and video tapes, tests and homework assignments are sent to them or to a remote site where the course is presented to a group of students (Zigerell, J. 1987).

As another example, Michigan State University offer several large lecture courses, usually on an introductory level, on video tape and show them at locations scattered throughout the campus. When courses are televised, graduate assistants often attend the sessions to answer questions. The courses taught this way include Introduction to Economics, Principles of Accounting, General Biology and Introductory Computer Programming (Slonaker, W. 1992).

A further example is found at Washington University where video is used to present information through the direct presentation of content for sociology, electrical engineering, life sciences, physical nursing, and business classes. Video is also used to teach professional skills in law, speech, social work, dentistry, and communication classes at this university (Quigley, B. 1986).

Video as a Supplementary Medium of Instruction

Video is more often and more widely used as a supplement medium of instruction than being used as the only medium of instruction in American universities and colleges. The following are some instances of this type of video use (Heinich, R. 1993).

a) At Cornell University, chemistry and biology lab demonstrations are taped and viewed at the beginning of a lab session. The tapes are available on cassette for later review. The scripts are written by the departments' leading professors, and the tapes present large amounts of material. This saves a great deal of time for both professors and students (Ansewqa, S. 1986).

b) Michigan State University uses video to supplement "live" teaching. One hour a week may be devoted to a taped lecture which all students enrolled in the course are required to attend; the rest of class hours are used for small group discussion (Slonaker, W. 1992).

c) Northern Illinois University uses video for ESL teacher training classes in which students watch taped model lessons. They also watch video tapes of themselves in micro-teaching practice situations and analyze their own performance.

d) According to an informal survey, 19 of 20 students of 11 graduate fields say that almost all their courses had used video in one way or another to supplement actual teacher instruction (Gunter, M. 1984).

The Use of Video in Chinese Higher Education

Chinese began to use video in higher education shortly after

the fall of the "Gang of Four" in 1976. With ups and downs caused by unsteady economic development and different views about its usefulness, this medium has gradually become one of the important media in Chinese higher education.

Video as a Major Medium of Instruction

Although the use of video in Chinese higher education has grown tremendously, no university so far has used it as a major medium for instruction for formal academic courses. However, one special type of higher education institution, which is also classified under adult education or distance education, uses video as the major medium of instruction. This is the TV university, or TV university network. Because of its special design and the fact that there is no equivalent type of institution in America, we will briefly introduce the Chinese TV university network (Yeh, K. 1983).

Chinese television university network has an organizational structure at four levels: the Central Radio and Television University, radio and television universities in the provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions (28 in all), branch schools under prefectures and cities (540 in all), and "grass-roots" classes run by factories, mines, shops, etc.

The Central Radio and Television University was established jointly by the Chinese Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Broadcasting in 1979. It is chiefly responsible for producing and transmitting teaching programs for major courses, for guiding the work of provincial TV universities, for preparing examinations and

rating standards, for compiling and publishes supplementary materials, produces and distributes audio cassette and video tapes.

The provincial TV universities are in charge of the branch schools, issuing diplomas and certificates, distributing printed as well as non-printed materials, branch schools basically organize and oversee student activities, compile student records at all stages of their study, and organizing examinations and tests. Classes run by "grass-roots work units" are held responsible for organizing viewing and listening of teaching programs, tutoring, laboratory experiments and other activities.

The TV university network enrolls three types of students: full-time, half-time and spare-time. Full-time and half-time students receive instruction mainly through pre-televised lectures on Central China Television and local televisions in branch schools or classes run by "grass-roots work units". The enrollment is incredibly large in number, e.g. in 1983 alone, 193,500 full-time and 205,000 half-time students were enrolled. Students are awarded a certificate (requiring three years of full-time study) or a B.A. degree (requiring 5 years of full-time study). TV university graduates now form a great proportion of China's educated workforce (Yek, K. 1983).

Video as a Supplement Medium of Instruction

In Chinese universities and colleges, video is chiefly used as a supplement medium of instruction. It is used basically in the following ways.

a) To provide demonstration at the beginning of classes and

examples for analysis in class for physical education courses. East China Educational Media reports that it is so used in almost all Chinese teachers universities and colleges and specialized PE institutions.

b) To provide supplementary teaching material for teaching listening, speaking, culture in foreign language programs, especially English as second language programs. How much the medium is used for this purpose varies from institution to institution depending on their budget situations and their views about the usefulness of the medium. Generally, the major universities uses much more than the regional ones.

c) To be used in teacher training, to provide model lessons, to show televised micro-teaching or actual teaching sessions so that the trainees can have a chance to analyze their performances. Unfortunately, only some leading teachers universities can afford to do this.

d) To be used in military education and moral education classes. Most universities and colleges in China have compulsory military education and moral education as a component of undergraduate programs. For example they use video tapes to show different types of weapons in military education class or to show a live speech of a famous speaker on an ethical topic.

e) To demonstrate the procedure of a lab experiment. This is a common use in most leading universities.

A Social-Cultural Explanation of the Differences in the Use of

Video in High Education Between U.S. and China

As can be seen from the previous sections that video as an educational medium has been used similarly in a number of aspects in both countries. However, it has also been used very differently. The major differences lie in the amount and method of use. In American higher education, a course may be offered through video. In China, however, except the TV university which may be said to be a type of non-conventional university, few of the university in China offers a whole course using video as a major medium of instruction. In addition, most classes in all Chinese universities and colleges do not use video at all, whereas in America, according the survey results, video is used often as a supplement to instruction. In terms of methods of use, in American college classes, it is more often used to provide input for discussion or writing or other kind of further work. In China, it is used, as it were, as an end in itself. The survey result shows that normally, no follow-up work is required after watching; but the content presented in the video tapes will be examined.

How do we account for these differences then? One way is to explain the differences from a social-cultural perspective.

Budgetary Issue

Although almost every government is reluctant to put money into education, but the American government certainly spends more money than the Chinese government on higher education. As a result of this, American universities have more technical equipment than

Chinese higher education institutions. Specifically, almost all American college classrooms have VCRs, whereas nearly all Chinese universities and colleges can only afford to build an Audio-visual teaching center where there are some rooms or halls that have VCRs and other audio-visual equipments. Thus, for the American instructor, all he/she needs to do is to bring a tape to the classroom. The Chinese instructor in contrast has to book a room and borrow a tape before class, and sometimes because of the limited space it is difficult to be scheduled in. So, very often the instructor ends up in not using video (Yeh, K. 1983).

Instructor's Perception of His/her Roles

That the Chinese instructors do not use video as much as the American instructors may also be a result of the instructor's perception of his/her roles. Since confucius's time, the instructor has been regarded as a master, an authority, a source of knowledge. His job is to impart knowledge to the students and the students are to passively receive this knowledge. The teacher is not to be questioned. In a typical classroom situation, the instructor is supposed to talk exclusively while students listen and take notes, only by which the job of teaching is considered to be appropriately done. With the introduction of educational technology, "many instructors find that their authority is threatened and feel that their role is insecure" (Wang, 1991). This cultural factor may be one of the main reasons why many Chinese instructors are reluctant to use video as a medium of instruction.

Students' Perception of Their Roles

Students' perception of their roles is another cultural factor that affects the amount of use of video in Chinese higher education. As can be seen from the previous section, in the Chinese educational setting, students expect their instructor to directly pass knowledge on to them. If the instructor provides information through means other than direct instruction, students may think that the instructor is not doing his/her job properly or even think that the instructor is not knowledgeable enough. The students may thus feel resentful to the instructor and the use of video as a medium of instruction.

Unsuccessful Experiences

Cao reports that "Some instructors give up using video because of their initial unsuccessful experiences in using it" (Cao, W. 1991). The Chinese instructors are more used to lecture as the mode of instruction than the more democratic lecture and discussion mode of instruction. When it comes to using video, some of them may simply show the tape without giving some leading questions or a proper introduction and then give assignments as soon as it is finished without having some sort of discussion. This way of using video proves to be ineffective as can be expected and the instructor may thus totally give up using this medium of instruction. In the Chinese social-cultural view, whenever the instructors have negative experiences, they usually don't try again. When they come to the conclusion that the video is

ineffective, they give up using it. In contrast, the American professors are more open and democratic. If one way does not get the expected results, they will listen to the feedback, and try other ways.

Summary

This paper briefly compared the uses of video as a medium of instruction in higher education between the United States and China and made tentative explanations from a social-cultural perspective of the differences in using this medium between these two countries. The differences lie in the fact that U.S. has more equipment and easier access to it. The Chinese instructors' and students' perception of teaching and learning properly conducted is still through instructor's delivery rather than video. Instructor's unsuccessful experiences in using it, and then giving up is also a reason. In order to use video as an important means in Chinese higher education, not only more equipment is needed, but also a change of perceptions of mode of instruction is necessary.

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